CBSK

OUR FAITH

Published by The Unitarian Christian Committee

Purpose: -- *"To diffuse the knowledge and promote the interests of pure religion, which, in accordance with the teachings of Jesus, is summed up in love to God and love to man."*

VOL. I APRIL, 1947 No. 1

Prayer in 1947

"God of continuity and change, help me to understand more fully how Thou art forever new yet changeless.

"Standing upon the solid ground of yesterday with its gifts that arm and enrich, I acknowledge humbly my place in the continuing line of lives building for those who follow. Oh God of renewal and growth! I seek to commit myself with profounder insight to the rooted principle of fellowship. As the world's conscience struggles for birth out of final travail, keep me aware that this is the fruit of countless separate lives united in aspiration and reconciled in the vision of humanity indivisible.

"Give me a clean heart, O God, for kinship with men everywhere, that something of the spirit that was in Jesus who saw humanity whole may dwell in me to be a guide and stay.

"Dear Lord and Father of mankind, I give most hearty thanks for life in this era of world conscience. I give thanks for my belief that in Thy service is perfect freedom, and in all new revelation of human progress fresh cause for faith that Thou hast put it in man's nature to meet and share in infinite fulfilling Purpose. Amen."

MRS. HERBERT LYMAN

(President of King's Chapel Branch of General Alliance, and Vice-Chairman of The Unitarian Christian Committee)

A Statement of Purpose

by The Unitarian Christian Committee

We are a group of Unitarians taking part in the general Unitarian Advance, with the intention of becoming more clearly and adequately Unitarian than ever. The genius of our group lies specifically in the cause for which the American Unitarian Association was founded: to "diffuse the knowledge of and promote the interests of pure Christianity". Our basis of unity is the Unitarian bond which many of our churches have written into their charters: "In the love of truth and in the spirit of Jesus Christ, we unite for the worship of God and the service of man". As a group, our reason for being is neither political nor organizational. We seek ways of living our simple covenant completely.

Contrary to the opinion of some, we are not primarily a theological movement in any new and strange doctrinal sense. Our theology is that which has come down to us as the undeviating mainstream of all great Unitarianism. We have considered that theology with as much critical reason and scholarship as we have at our command, and we find it good. Our hope is to make our theology live, for it seems to us rational, powerful, and eternally modern. We believe in God, Jesus Christ, man and the church, in terms that are compatible with the point of view held by David Lindsey, Martineau, Channing and Parker.

In our opinion, the goals of Unitarian Advance are commendable so far as they go, and we intend to support them with a zeal born of Christian devotion to every good cause. To the cause of freedom (provided it operates according to the principles of community) we are dedicated. We shall further the truth in its advance, strengthen democracy everywhere, and promote world brotherhood within a world community.

In our opinion, however, these goals, worthy in themselves and calling forth full support, are not enough to provide the gospel for which this age (and every age) cries out. Within the framework of our Unitarian fellowship and in accordance with all that is best in our Unitarian faith, we believe, in addition:

That God, the Father of all men, is to be worshipped with all our hearts and proclaimed to the people as the living God.

That Jesus of Nazareth exemplified the mind of God in a manner so full and sufficient that his life is our surest guide and most enduring inspiration.

That we are part of the total Christian Church, which, diverse and manysided, in a multitude of ways has developed the religious movement sprung from the life and teachings of Jesus.

v.1- 4:7
1947-50

This is our intention, these are our convictions. In their spirit, and praying ever for the help of God, we have undertaken our Unitarian Christian task.

(For information address Rev. Paul H. Chapman, Secretary, 27 Malborough Street, Boston, Mass.)

The Christian Way of Unitarian Advance

(A digest of a sermon preached at King's Chapel, July 2, 1944.)

The thesis of this sermon may be stated simply as follows: We shall substantially advance when, and only when, we bear witness in our own lives to the full power and import of Unitarian Christianity.

First, Unitarians will advance when they are a living testimony to the reality of God.

Second, Unitarians will advance when they are a living testimony to the understanding of man's true nature.

Third, Unitarians will advance when they are a living testimony to the spirit that was in Jesus.

Fourth, Unitarians will advance when they are a living testimony to the reality of the organic, historic church.

Fifth, Unitarians will advance when they are a living testimony to the reality of human brotherhood.

These are the five realities toward which a sound Unitarian advance can be launched. We are in the valley of decision. The urgency of the times has sharpened the issue for us. Shall we or shall we not derive our sustenance from pure Christianity as we confront a world heavy with sweat, drenched in blood, surfeited with tears? The choice is sharp and clean. Remember how Pizarro stood before his travel-weary and emaciated band of men upon the shore of what is now Colombia, and drew upon the sand a line with his rapier. "Those who wish for ease and security," he said, "may return. As for me, I go south." So stand we. In many directions lie ease and security; in some directions lies a bizarre and illusory adventure. Ahead is the way of pure Christianity, adequate to the earth's salvation, of universal import, and eternally modern. It is a strait way, a severe trial for flabby minds or unstable temperaments. It is a broad way, unmarked throughout vast stretches of its course. There lies our frontier. Let us resolve to take that road, as we are earnestly charged in conscience by the Lord our God, until His true church shall come into its own.

REV. ALEXANDER WINSTON

On Believing in God

(From the writings of George R. Dodson)

A belief in God must be held in the face of the problem of evil, of the mystery of suffering, and of the irrationalities and injustices that linger in the world; but a still greater difficulty faces the atheist, namely, the origin and existence not of evil, but of good.

On the atheistic theory, intelligent, self-sacrificing men, drinking the hemlock and dying on crosses for their ideals, are the inexplicable product of the impersonal unconscious lifeless forces of the universe. How, we may ask, out of a purely physical order can a moral order arise? How out of the impersonal energies of the cosmos can arise the great company of men and women for whom some values are worth more than life, and who crave friendship with one another, and with the Eternal? The issue between theistic faith and the crude naturalism or mechanism that is the alternative, will not be settled by demonstration in our time. Religion chooses the adventurous faith in a God who is more and not less than our highest symbols—a faith in a world of increasing purpose, of progressive incarnation, where "All's love, yet all's law." The athetistic way has insuperable difficulties. It brings a sense of infinite loneliness for the present and a depressing outlook for the future. Those who in sincerity are compelled to accept it will go forward courageously and sadly, but without hope. Men do not sow wheat where they do not think wheat will grow. They do not try to raise strawberries in Greenland or water lilies in the desert. They will not enthusiastically engage in moral and spiritual enterprises if they believe that the universe is against them.

This is quite obvious to those who are acquainted with the views of modern writers on civilization. Those who have lost their faith in God see only gloomy prospects. They are often pessimistic and generally without hope. Is not this inevitable? If the universe is the expression of unconscious, purposeless forces, or of a blind, groping will, what reason is there to think our race can rise higher? It was, therefore, true insight which led one of the world's leading scholars recently to declare that "The fact of the religious vision, and its history of persistent expansion, is our one ground for optimism. Apart from it, human life is a flash of occasional enjoyments lighting up a mass of pain and misery, a bagatelle of transient experience." Those who see only the transient, superficial flux of things must always fall into discouragement, but religion brings hope and faith and courage because behind the outward show it sees the permanent satisfying reality.

The great tonic concept of God is therefore in every way central in importance for religion. For it, when it is lost or temporarily obscured, there is no substitute. If the universe is lifeless and meaningless, its grandeur is the more appalling. If a child should come home in the evening and search in vain through a great house for its parents, it would not be consoled by one who should say, "You have no father or mother, but see what a great house you live in and how richly furnished." The little one would be inconsolable. Its heart would cry out, "I want my father. I want my mother." So, when at Easter or at other times, we think of the hereafter, most hearts feel assured if they can believe in God, of Whose love our love is but a symbol. If God is, what is best for us will be. But if God is not, then death ends all, and fortunately, for who wishes to face a future in a godless, meaningless universe, empty of life and purpose and love? The poet's words are true:

'Life, death, and immortality,
Are in my thought of God.'

This, then, is our situation. We must act now, in the living present, and with incomplete information. Life will not wait. The wise live by postulates, and the just and the unjust live by faith. Life is a thrilling adventure. It is given to each of us to write before it the plus or minus sign. Those who take the way of faith, of Plato's trust in the reality of the Supreme Values, and of Jesus' faith in a goodness at the heart of the world, have been able to build lives of effort and action, of peace, health, and real happiness. In all life's perplexities, obscurities, and unmastered evils, they keep the victorious tone. They advance into the unseen with a cheer, saying with a hero of faith in the olden time, 'If God be for us, who can be against us?"

Is Unitarian Freedom an Absolute Freedom?

There is a far too widespread tendency among some Unitarians to assume that we really do not believe in anything definite, but just in "freedom". Nothing could be farther from the truth. Perfect freedom is perfect emptiness—as, indeed, contemporary life often demonstrates. One cannot be free in general. Freedom is a transitive term, requiring an object; one must always be free for something.

In Unitarianism, our freedom is not freedom in general, it is freedom for religion. As Earl Morse Wilbur rightly says, our movement has been characterized by "complete mental freedom in religion", — not outside of religion, or against religion, but in religion. Our movement exists for the purpose of promoting the interests of pure religion, which, in accordance with the teachings of Jesus, is summed up in love to God and love to man.

It is difficult to see how this freedom of Unitarianism, thus clearly defined, can possibly justify any freedom to destroy religion. When one finds that Unitarian young people at a Unitarian conference have been subjected systematically to a speaker who has deliberately sought to destroy, by ridicule and otherwise, their faith in God, in prayer, and in immortality, one wonders by what interpretation of Unitarian freedom such a thing occurs. One wonders how such an action fits properly under our purpose—"to promote . . . . love to God."

Perhaps it is high time we took our freedom with a greater sense of religious responsibility, and corrected some of its abuses.

REV. HARVEY SWANSON

The Reality of the Spiritual

And now, my friends, having looked at man, let us look beyond man. It seems reasonable to ask, How does man come by the characteristics of his spiritual nature? Is there a source beyond us which brought us to value truth and beauty and goodness? Does the reality of the spiritual, which none can question, mean the reality of God?

One thing we know today. Our consciousness of ourselves and of the spiritual values of man has appeared at the end of a long process of evolution. That process took so long, the scientists tell us, that man seems to have been around only a few minutes compared with the countless millions of years taken by the whole process. So it appears that we, with our spiritual values, are but late arrivals in the long process of nature.

The most wonderful feature of the process is the emergence of new organic wholes, and the new qualities realized in the new organic wholes. In the fullness of time the complex cellular structure of the human brain reached a new level. A new quality appeared, the self-consciousness of man. And lo, as the Hebrew writer of the story of the Garden of Eden has it, "the Lord God said, Behold man is become as one of us, to know good and evil." (Genesis 3:22)

So it appears that in the course of nature our mental life with its spiritual values had a long pre-human history. Behind our mental life was the instinctive life of animals, and behind the adaptations of animals was the sensitivity of plants with their flowers turning to the sun, and behind the vegetable kingdom a sort of purposive energy within the atom.

What do we make of all that? Simply this. In the light of that vision of science, we see that all creation itself has its spiritual aspect. The creative evolutionary process has to be judged as any process is judged, by that which comes forth in the end. And in the fullness of time the silence of eternity was broken. Man came forth, self-conscious man, the lover of spiritual values of truth and beauty and goodness.

Many have been the attempts to break through the seen into the unseen. Many attempts have failed because the seekers were looking for a God who was somehow living in a world of his own, independent of the world we know, and playing fast and loose with the laws of the physical world. The knowledge of such a God was bound to be elusive. Nor could the existence of such a God ever be proved.

We must always think of the spiritual as working within the material, as working within the order of the world revealed to our senses, and as creating the spiritual values that have come to light through the evolutionary process.

As the philosopher Aristotle wrote: "Thus must we think of God, who in might is most powerful, in beauty most fair, in time immortal, in goodness supreme; for, though he is invisible to all mortal nature, yet is he seen in his very works." (De Mundo, vi, 399b.) Or as the apostle Paul wrote, "The invisible things of God since the creation of the world are seen, being perceived through the things that are made." (Romans 1:20).

So my friends, there is no question about the reality of the spiritual. And we are not left orphaned in the universe. Each one of us aspires after spiritual values. And, as the flower turns to the sun, so each one of us, when our ardor for truth is burning low and our vision of goodness is growing dim, can turn for renewal to that creative source from which our aspirations came."

DR. ROWLAND GRAY-SMITH
(Minister of New North Church, Hingham, Mass.)

Contributions toward the expense of "Our Faith" over and above the subscription price, are earnestly requested from all friends.

Articles suitable for publication in "Our Faith" are welcome from all who wish to use these columns to express Unitarian Christianity.

Extra copies of "Our Faith' in quantity may be secured, on order, from the editor, for distribution in local parishes.

Our Faith

Personal Statements of Faith from Unitarian Men and Women

"I believe God is closer to me than hands or feet, nearer to me than breathing. I believe God is my Father. And when I am fully conscious of my kinship with Him, His love, wisdom and power are available to me. This places the responsibility on me of helping to do His work. It changes my prayer from petition to thanksgiving."

ESTHER FREY MAGEE
Lancaster, Pa.

—:—

"As a Unitarian I am very happy to acknowledge a profound faith in God—the Great Power beyond one's self—all-wise, infinitely intelligent, and loving. I have placed myself in His care, and am grateful to Him for many blessings."

MRS. IRA S. HUBER
Lancaster, Pa.

"I believe in Advancing Religious Liberalism because I believe that God is at the foundation of life, and the truest possible understanding of God is the best road to peace and progress on earth. I regard religious liberalism as but another name for search for the truth in the field of religion wherever that truth may be found.

"My religious faith rests upon the two great Commandments — 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind' and 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' The Golden Rule translates these into action. It is our first duty to put that faith into daily practice among ourselves and with all nations."

HAROLD H. BURTON
Washington, D. C.

You are invited to send your own testimony of the faith that is in you, for publication in this paper, that we may mutually help each other in our faith.

"OUR FAITH" is published monthly (except July and August) by The Unitarian Christian Committee, 27 Marlborough St., Boston, 16, Mass. Mr. Theodore Browne, President; Rev. Paul H. Chapman, 33 Glen Green, Winchester, Mass., Secretary.

The editorial board of "OUR FAITH" consists of: Mr. Robert Rantoul, Mrs. Herbert Lyman, Rev. Carl Bihldorff, Dr. Vivian T. Pomeroy, Dr. H. H. Saunderson, and Dr. Rowland Gray-Smith.

Editor: Rev. Harvey Swanson, 538 W. Chestnut St., Lancaster, Pa. All mailings from Lancaser, Pa.

Subscription price: $1.00 per year, payable to Mr. Robert Rantoul, Treasurer, 17 Channing St., Cambridge, 38, Mass.